



ground score

Over the past several years, a scramble of Herculean proportions has been enacted: the hunt for antique wooden surfboards by collectors, speculators, and the odd curator. While the rarest coins are certainly vintage Hawaiian pieces, production surf and paddleboards from the Tom Blake and Pacific System Homes are rapidly following suit. And, while a guy with a grand or two in his billfold can still access a basic, refinished Catalina Equipment or L.A. Ladder Blake paddleboard, mint examples from the original contractor, Mr. Rogers Co. and Robert Mitchell Manufacturing Company of Cincinnati have gone the way of the dodo.



So imagine Texan collector Pat Magee's delight when he received a phone call from an antique "picker" who had learned that Pat collected surfboards. This gentleman mentioned that he had purchased a wooden board at an estate sale on the shores of Lake Washington, near Seattle. Seeing an ad in *Longboard* (we seem to be becoming a source of sorts for vintage surfing interest), the phone calls began. The original owner had been a member of the Seattle Yacht Club, and was probably intrigued by the 1935 brochure offering "this miniature yacht...the streamlined, air chamber, Hawaiian Hollow Surfboard." The Blake had been sent to Seattle from safari outfitter Abercrombie & Fitch in New York City, and was still ensconced in A&F wrapping paper, carefully wedged into a



"The kind the life guards and the only known Mitchell in existence.

custom shipping container. The 12'10" is constructed of African mahogany, brass fittings, three coats of marine star varnish, and is in "mint plus" condition. Cherry only begins to describe it: the decal pops with unblemished clarity, the brightwork is shining-even the brass screws are all turned to "12 o'clock."

What might such a beast fetch on the auction block? Who knows. It's not for sale. Unlabeled guesses point in a \$15-zoK direction. Magee, a father, is probably visualizing it as a year or two at an Ivy League school for one of his progeny. Tom Blake historian and early surfboard expert Gary Lynch notes that the Mitchell company boards were vended only on the East Coast and in Hawaii, so they wouldn't compete with Rogers, the Los Angeles contractor. "Pat-Magee has been collecting and storing surfboards for decades," notes Lynch. "Since the late '90s, he's one of the avid few who felt it was important to curate King's heritage. Lord knows the museums don't seem to care. They tend to lump in with hot rods and other pop culture, which leads me to believe that they don't know squat."

-Scott Huie



MOMA's Got a Woody: Yes, But Is It Art?

What do Hobie Alter and Pablo Picasso have in common? Both have their work exhibited in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

The 1958 vintage Hobie balsa gun will be on display until the end of the year, said Paola Antonelli, Associate Curator of MOMA's Department of Architecture and Design. "I think it's amazing how surfboards are advanced for their times," Ms. Antonelli said. "Advanced materials are tested by the military and surfers. It's also one of the best applications of the materials available."

"Yeah, I shaped it," said Hobie Alter from his winter home in Idaho. "I shaped one for Buzzy Trent over in Hawaii just before then. If I had an influence then I guess that would be it. But this was a one of a kind. It's close to 10'6" long, had a few redwood stringers off each side-it's a big-wave board."

Mr. Alter explained that the board had been created for a Sports Illustrated magazine article on design and sports. It was donated to the museum in 1962. The board was stored in the museum's archives before being put on display again in 1999.

For now, the gleaming T-stringer balsa and redwood masterpiece occupies a corner of the design department, alongside Frank Lloyd Wright chairs, a red Ferrari Formula 1 and a green, dragonfly shaped 1945 Bell helicopter (which was a prototype for the medevac choppers used in the Korean War). Finally, it seems that the surfboard has been recognized as art, or at least an outstanding example of haute twentieth century design.

University of Oklahoma architecture student Clifton Donaghue stood for a moment contemplating the Hobie's classic lines. "I was expecting to find fine-arts crud like paintings," he said. "but I wasn't really expecting to find a surfboard here. I like it."

-Rob Cummings